

THE STORY OF EIGHT GENERAL ELECTIONS.

By Arthur H. U. Colquhoun.

THE ELECTION OF 1867.

OF the group of British Americans who met in London toward the close of 1866 to frame the Confederation Act, Sir John Macdonald (as he soon after became) stood out pre-eminent and predominant. His fellow delegates, recognizing his ascendancy, had selected him as the chairman of their conferences. The Imperial authorities were impressed by his talent for management and adroitness. To them he was the ruling genius of the affair.* Before leaving London he was asked by Lord Monck to form the first Ministry for the new Dominion. In Canada he was even more clearly acknowledged as the leading political force, for he had obtained not merely the headship of his own party but the confidence of a considerable section of his old opponents.

This supremacy of one man vitally affected the result of the elections of 1867. The situation was peculiar. It had been determined, as far as Ontario and Quebec were concerned, to continue the Coalition as a basis for the new Government. This enabled Sir John Macdonald to retain three Liberals of influence in his Cabinet. Mr. George Brown, the only antagonist he had real reason to fear, was thus prevented from reorganizing the Liberal party, which his force and vigour had done so much to create, in the very Province where its influence and power could best be displayed. The tactical skill of his opponent prevailed. Mr. Brown had retired from the Coalition, still pledged to Confederation, but on all other subjects bent on destroying the temporary alliance between the parties. A convention of Liberals was summoned to meet in Toronto in the early days of July, but is not easy to restore, by im-

passioned speeches and fervent newspaper articles, an organization that has been allowed to lapse.

To any man with less than George Brown's buoyancy of spirit and fertility of resource the failure, on the eve of the contest, to re-create his party would have meant final defeat. For the time being, indeed, he was overwhelmed. The new Cabinet contained men who drew support from all sections of the people. From the Maritime Provinces, where the party lines of Old Canada could not be made to operate, came some men who regarded the new Union with an open mind and were disposed to give it a fair trial. Those who had opposed Confederation in all the Provinces were chiefly Liberals and ranged themselves in Opposition. It was impossible for George Brown to rally these forces in his train because on the one subject which united them all he stood out—as a stout and uncompromising friend of the Confederation. His position was a trying one. If he could have got Dorion, Holton, Howe and Sandfield Macdonald to act together, a formidable and compact party would have resulted. But Sandfield Macdonald was soothed by the Premiership of Ontario. Howe was far away in Nova Scotia. There was no time for elaborate preparation.

In August and September the elections came on, and the Ministry swept the country except in Nova Scotia. Mr. Brown was defeated in South Ontario by Mr. Gibbs, and never again offered for the House of Commons. He took his repulse like a man. "I am not a bit discouraged by the result of the elections and did not feel two minutes' chagrin at my own defeat," he said.* The blow to the party was

*The Letters of Lord Blachford. London, 1896.

*Life and Speeches of Hon. George Brown. Toronto, 1882.